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INFO RUCNOSC/ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY COOPERATION IN EUROPE

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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM KIRF KISL PGOV KDEM ASEC AJ

SUBJECT: MINOR CARTOON PROTEST EVOLVES OUT OF ASHURA CEREMONIES

REF: BAKU 194

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) Following Ashura observances at one of Baku's main mosques on February 9, a group of around 200 protestors decided to break off from the main group to march to the French Embassy to protest the Mohammed cartoons. While the group was able to march a reasonable distance, it was finally stopped by the police in one of Baku's main shopping districts, several hundred meters from the French Embassy. Police allowed two protestors to deliver a letter to Embassy guards to register their complaints. Police then told the group to disperse, and after a short hesitation the group marched back towards the mosque. The protest was organized by the Birlik (Unity) Society, a small and relatively unknown religious group.

¶2. (SBU) Separately, religious activist Ilgar Ibrahimoglu had applied earlier in the week for permission to hold a rally from 20th January metro station to Galaba Square on February 11. (This was the route for sanctioned political party rallies last year.) The rally was supposed to be a follow on from his "No to Islamophobia" conference on February 7 (reftel). However, on February 10 the Baku Mayor's office rejected Ibrahimoglu's petition. Ibrahimoglu told us that his group would not attempt an unsanctioned rally, but will appeal to the courts and apply to the Mayor's office for another rally in the near future.

¶3. (U) Post will continue to monitor the mood in Azerbaijan regarding the issue and report as necessary septel.

HARNISH